Musical Memories: Translating an Evidence-Based Protocol into a Picture Book for Children & their families

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Alzheimer’s Disease (AD)

• Approx. 5.5 million Americans currently have a diagnosis of AD

• AD is characterized by: Severe cognitive and behavioral changes that progress over time.

• Although short-term memory is severely impaired, remote memory often remains intact into the advanced stages of the disease
Family Dynamics

- Persons with AD are often cared for in multi-generational families
- 26% of family caregivers have children < 16 years
- Elizabeth Smith-Boivin declares, “children as the forgotten victims of AD”
• Elders with dementia are particularly receptive to nonverbal communication and were sensitive to the child’s fears and anxiety.

• Chronic confusion experienced by an elder can not be viewed in isolation of other family members. The response of other family members will directly or indirectly impact the elder’s quality of life.
Musical Memories

- Realistic fiction picture book.
- Targeted for children 8 to 12 years of age
- Underlying message of understanding and compassion transcends to persons of all ages.
- Story of Gabrielle and her grandmother who has AD
- Provides an honest and respectful depiction of older person with AD
- Goes beyond issue of short-term memory loss to address causes of anxiety and agitation
Key Points

• Promotes a problem solving approach to model a simple intergenerational activity (music) to empower a granddaughter in maintaining a relationship with her grandmother

• Applies basic principles of the evidence-based guideline of Individualized Music for Elders with Dementia (5th Ed.)

• A key factor for the successful use of individualized music is identification of specific music selections, including both song titles and performers, that will stimulate remote memory and elicit positive feelings to prevent or alleviate agitation.

• Music serves as a catalyst to unveil Grandmother’s personhood, promote communication, elicit positive memories, reduce anxiety, and alleviate agitation.
Ever since Gabrielle started taking ballet lessons two years ago, she dreamed of seeing her first professional ballet. And when Grandma surprised her with tickets to see *Cinderella*, her jaw dropped in disbelief.

She jumped, letting out a joyous whoop, and began pirouetting around the room.
A few weeks later, Gabrielle’s heart was still dancing when they reached the entrance to the theater. This was going to be the best evening ever. “I know that the two of you normally go on outings by yourselves,” Mom said as they crossed the lobby. “Thanks for letting me come along this time.”

As the lights dimmed and the orchestra began to play, the murmur of the audience stilled. Gabrielle perched on the edge of her seat. Then the curtains opened and she was swept away, transported to a faraway land in a time long ago.

For the next two hours, the ballet dancers glided, twirled, and leaped across the stage.
Gabrielle’s mother used to read the story of Cinderella to her, but tonight the story was being told through music and dance without any need for words. Gabrielle was entranced by the dancers’ graceful movements. She even saw Grandma smiling and applauding with all of her might, and her mother too sat leaning forward, captured by the magic of the evening.
Afterward, the audience poured out of the theatre. Grandma and Gabrielle were swept with the crowd, getting jostled along the way.

“Pardon me,” said a tall man as he bumped into Grandma’s arm. But Grandma did not respond. She clutched Gabrielle’s arm, her eyes darting back and forth.

Once outside, Gabrielle and Grandma waited by the curb while Mom got the car. The night air was filled with the sound of people talking and laughing. Nervously, Grandma shifted her weight from one leg to the other. A constant stream of cars drove past with bright headlights flashing in their eyes.
A red car stopped in front of Grandma. She opened the door and started to get in, but Gabrielle grabbed her arm, pulling her back.

“Grandma, that’s not our car!”

“Don’t be silly,” Grandma snapped at Gabrielle.

A woman standing directly behind them said softly, “Excuse me ma’am, this is our ride.”

“Sorry,” Gabrielle mumbled and stepped back so the woman could get in. She frantically scanned the street, then sighed with relief. “Here she comes now, I see her blue car.”
As Mom pulled up to the curb, Grandma climbed into the front seat without saying a word. She fiddled with the program in her hand, folding and unfolding the paper.

“Is something wrong?” Mom asked.

Grandma looked away.
Mom’s questioning eyes met Gabrielle’s in the rearview mirror, but Gabrielle just shrugged and lowered her gaze. After being so excited about the evening, she didn’t even mention the ballet. An uneasy silence filled the car. When they finally arrived home, Gabrielle went straight to her room and shut the door.
Come to the presentation to hear the complete story. The best is yet to come. A question and answer session will follow the reading.